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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AMCITS: Newsletter of the U.S. Embassy, Ottawa

A Message from Ambassador Wilkins

Election Approaching

Request Your Absentee Ballots Now!



Happy New Year! On behalf of Susan and me, as well as the entire United States Mission in Canada, here's wishing 2008 brings you much peace and prosperity.

This year will be an eventful one for the United States, bringing with it presidential primary races in each of our states, as well as the presidential and other important national elections this coming November.

Make sure your vote counts! We encourage you to visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program (<http://fvap.gov>) for information on requesting an absentee ballot.

The weather service is also reporting that by the end of 2007 we had received more snow fall across Canada than we had received all last winter! That makes for some hazardous driving conditions.

Some roads and bridges are subject to periodic winter closures. Snow tires are required in some Provinces. The Canadian Automobile Association (<http://www.ca.ca>) has tips for winter driving in Canada. Travelers should also be cautious of deer, elk and moose while driving at night in rural areas.

The U.S. Mission is here to serve you. Please write, email or phone if we can be of any service to you. Again, on behalf of our Mission family to yours may you enjoy a safe and joyful new year.

Best Wishes,

Ambassador David H. Wilkins

**Online Registration and Absentee Ballot Request
Form Available at <http://fvap.gov>**

Toll Free Number for Voter Information

1-800-438-8683

IT'S YOUR FUTURE! Absentee Voting Assistance for Upcoming Elections

Under U.S. law, qualified American citizens residing abroad may register and vote by absentee ballot in their state of last residence. The electoral process is administered by each individual state and you vote by mailing an absentee ballot to your home state. All American citizens living abroad are reminded that 2008 is a general and presidential election year in the United States. Overseas citizens are eligible to participate in presidential and state primary elections, run-off elections and special elections that occur throughout the year, as well as the general elections in November 2008.

We strongly encourage you to register to vote and/or request absentee ballots well in advance of the presidential and state primary elections, which will begin in January 2008, to ensure that you will receive all ballots for which you are eligible. Should questions or problems occur, you would still be able to address them in time to vote in the 2008 elections.

The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov. It has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the downloadable absentee ballot application, state-specific instructions for completing the form, links to state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot.

To register to vote and to request an absentee ballot, download the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) at

<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpca.html>. You can also obtain this form from overseas American citizens groups or from the nearest U.S. embassy/consulate. Fill it out and send it in, following the guidelines for your state. The FPCA can be mailed postage-free through the Embassy/Consulate diplomatic pouch. However, international mail is often faster and should be used at your expense, particularly if you are mailing material shortly before your state's filing or election deadline.

If you make a timely application for an absentee ballot for a general federal election but do not receive it in time, you may also use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) which can be obtained at the consular section nearest you or on the Internet at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/forms.html>. You must provide proof that you have already applied for an absentee ballot before you are eligible to use the FWAB. It is valid only for federal elections. The FWAB can be mailed by the same methods as the FPCA but must show a return address from abroad.

Consular Voting Assistance Officers are available to answer questions about absentee voting. Please note, however, that voting officers do not provide information on candidates and issues. It is the voter's responsibility to keep informed on such matters.

ABSENTEE VOTING—Frequently Asked Questions

Q. If I do not maintain a legal residence in the U.S., what is my "legal state of residence?"

Your "legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This right extends to overseas citizens even though they may not have property or other ties in their last state or territory of residence and their intent to return to that state or territory may be uncertain. When completing the FPCA's Voting Residence section, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence, including street or rural route and number. The address determines your proper district, ward, precinct or parish for voting purposes. Family members of citizens residing overseas, who are U.S. citizens and who have never resided in the U.S. may claim one of their U.S. citizen parent's legal state or territory of residence as their own if allowed by the state. Check [Chapter 3](#) of the *Guide*.

Q. Will I be taxed by my last state or territory of residence if I vote absentee?

Exercising your right to vote in elections for Federal offices only, does not affect the determination of residence or domicile for purposes of any tax imposed under Federal, state, or local law. Voting in an election for Federal office only, may not be used as the sole basis to determine residency for the purpose of imposing state and local taxes. If you claim a particular state or territory as your residence and have other ties with that state or territory in addition to voting, then you may be liable for state and local taxation, depending upon the laws of that particular state or territory. Consult legal counsel for information on probable tax obligations.

THE BASIC ABSENTEE VOTING PROCESS

Step 1: Citizen completes and mails the Federal Post Card Application Form (SF-76), [Registration and Absentee Ballot Request Form](#).

Step 2: Local Election Official approves Registration request or requests further information

Step 3: Local Election Official mails absentee ballot*

Step 4: Citizen votes and mails the absentee ballot to the Local Election Official in time to meet state deadlines.

* In order to receive an absentee ballot in a timely manner, it is imperative for citizens to keep their local election official informed of address changes.

United States Ratifies the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption

On December 12, Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Maura Harty formalized the United States' ratification of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption at a ceremony at The Hague. The United States is now a full member of the Hague Convention, and its provisions will govern intercountry adoptions between the United States and other Convention member countries beginning April 1, 2008.

The Convention establishes international norms and procedures for processing intercountry adoption cases involving other Hague Convention members. It mandates safeguards to protect the interests of children, birth parents, and adoptive parents. It also provides that member nations recognize adoptions that take place within other Hague Convention countries.

The ratification completed a process begun in 1994, when the United States signed the Convention after participating actively in its negotiation and adoption. In 2000, the Senate consented to ratification and Congress passed implementing legislation, the Intercountry Adoption Act (IAA). The Department of State, with the Department of Homeland Security, promulgated the regulations which govern the immigration and visa processes in a Hague case, developed the standards and procedures for the accreditation of adoption service providers, and took other actions deemed necessary to implement the Convention.

Beginning April 1, 2008, The Hague Convention will govern intercountry adoptions between the United States and other Convention countries. The major changes to the way intercountry adoptions are processed under the Hague Convention are:

- The Department of State, designated as the "Central Authority" for the United States under the Hague Convention and the IAA, is responsible for ensuring that the Hague Convention and IAA requirements are followed.
- Accrediting entities designated by the Department of State must accredit any U.S. adoption service providers that will handle Convention adoption cases.
- The Department of State will maintain a centralized registry to track all adoption cases (both incoming and outgoing cases, in Hague Convention cases and in non-Convention cases), and to receive complaints and comments about accredited adoption service providers involved in Hague Convention cases.

Outgoing intercountry adoption cases from the United States to other Hague Convention countries, such as Canada or Mexico, must also comply with the Convention and the IAA.

FACT SHEET: AVIAN INFLUENZA A (H5N1) and PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

This fact sheet alerts Americans to the Department of State's preparedness efforts with respect to a possible influenza pandemic. The Department of State emphasizes that, in the event of a pandemic, its ability to assist Americans traveling and residing abroad may be severely limited by restrictions on local and international movement imposed for public health reasons, either by foreign governments and/or the United States. Furthermore, American citizens should take note that the Department of State cannot provide Americans traveling or living abroad with medications or supplies even in the event of a pandemic.

Background - H5N1 Avian Influenza A

Countries continue to report cases of avian influenza A(H5N1), commonly referred to as "bird flu" in their domestic and wild bird populations. In addition, countries are reporting H5N1 in other wild and domestic animal populations. A small number of confirmed cases of H5N1 among humans have been reported, some of which have resulted in death. More information is available on the World Health Organization (WHO) website, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en/. Please refer to this website for the most up to date information on the countries affected by H5N1 and the number of deaths.

The vast majority of the reported human cases have resulted from direct contact with H5N1-infected poultry. Although there is evidence to suggest very limited, human-to-human transmission in family groups involving close exposure to a critically ill member, there is no evidence that the virus can be easily or sustainably transmitted from human-to-human. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (DHHS/CDC), the WHO, and the Department of State are nonetheless concerned about the potential for the virus to adapt or mutate into a strain that can be easily transmitted in a sustained manner among humans, a characteristic that could result in a human influenza pandemic, and are working closely with other partners to prepare for the possibility of pandemic influenza. Information on the U.S. Government's overall response and efforts is available at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>.

Travel and Avian Influenza A

The Department of State, the DHHS/CDC and the WHO have not issued any health precautions, travel alerts or warnings for H5N1 infected areas. However, the DHHS/CDC advises travelers to H5N1 affected countries to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces or fluids from poultry or other animals, and to eat only thoroughly cooked poultry products. American citizens traveling to or living in H5N1 affected countries should consider the potential risks and keep informed of the latest medical guidance and information in order to make appropriate plans. Specific DHHS/CDC travel information relating to H5N1, including preventive measures, is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm> and <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. WHO guidance related to avian influenza is available at http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/.

Additional general country information can be obtained from the Department of State's Consular Information Sheets at <http://travel.state.gov> and embassy and consulate websites at http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/embassies/embassies_1214.html. You may also call the Department of State's toll-free number, 1-888-407 4747, or if calling from overseas, 202-501-4444.

Prevention, Response and Treatment - Take Charge of Your Plans

A vaccine for humans that is effective in preventing infection with the avian influenza A (H5N1) virus is not yet available. Based upon limited data, the DHHS/CDC has suggested that the anti-viral medication Oseltamivir (brand name-Tamiflu) may be effective in treating avian influenza A. U.S. embassies and consulates do not have supplies of this drug for use by private American citizens abroad. The Department of State has pre-positioned supplies of the drug Tamiflu at its embassies and consulates worldwide, for eligible U.S. Government employees and their families serving abroad. Americans should also be aware of the potential health risk posed by counterfeit drugs, including those

represented as Tamiflu, by scam artists who sell products on the internet or in countries with lax regulations governing the production and distribution of pharmaceuticals. For more information on counterfeit drugs please visit the Food and Drug Administrations (FDA) questions and answers for counterfeit drugs at <http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/counterfeit/qa.html>

In addition, the Department of State has asked its embassies and consulates to consider preparedness measures that take into consideration the fact that travel into or out of a country may not be possible, safe, or medically advisable during a pandemic. Guidance on how private citizens can prepare to shelter in place, including stocking food, water, and medical supplies, is available at the www.pandemicflu.gov website. Embassy stocks cannot be made available to private American citizens abroad and we encourage people living in an area with outbreaks of H5N1 to prepare appropriately.

It is also likely that governments will respond to a pandemic by imposing public health measures that restrict domestic and international movement, further limiting the U.S. government's ability to assist Americans in these countries. These measures can be implemented very quickly. Areas of known H5N1 outbreaks in poultry have been quarantined by governments within 24 hours, restricting (if not preventing) movement into and out of the affected area.

Americans who are planning travel to a country that has reported the virus or who are concerned about avian influenza are advised to monitor the DHHS/CDC and the WHO websites for the latest information.

CDC Contact Information

Public Inquiries:

English (888) 246-2675

Spanish (888) 246-2857

TTY (866) 874-2646

Mon-Fri 8am-11pm EST

Sat-Sun 10am-8pm EST

Address:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Rd.

Atlanta, GA 30333

USA (404) 639-3311

Traveler's Website

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

WHO Liaison Office in Washington, DC

Contact Information:

Telephone: (202) 974-3787

Facsimile: (202) 974-3789

Address:

WHO Liaison Office

1889 F Street, N.W., Suite 369

Washington, D.C. 20006 USA